

NEWS

FROM YOUR MUSEUM

THE ROYAL ONTARIO MUSEUM

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ANIMALS GET READY FOR WINTER TOO

With winter just ahead, the provident citizen is making his house weather-proof. Storm doors and windows are being searched out and insulating material—rockwool, sawdust or moss, is being applied to mansion and shack. How do our wild animals meet the wintry blasts, zoologists of the Royal Ontario Museum were asked? For some, the warm-blooded animals, the problem is akin to the human one of keeping warm. The active furry creatures grow a thicker coat, while others hibernate. Most of our birds, like the pre-war wealthy, retreat to warmer climates. For the cold-blooded animals the danger lies in sudden great changes of temperature rather than in continued cold. There are several ways of insulating against these changes. Many of the small crawling things—snails, centipedes, and beetles—find safety under the protecting mantle of forest litter and snow. Others dig down into the soil. The common toad burrows only a few inches, while an earthworm may tunnel 4 or 5 feet. Spiders make the best insulation of all. Those kinds that have eggs that winter over spin a fluffy mass of woolly silk around their egg mass. They are the “rockwool” experts of the animal world.

BUT IS IT A WOLF?

The hunting season has been marked in recent years by numerous newspaper reports of wolves killed in southern Ontario. Although we are not confirmed debunkers and take no delight in shattering the illusion of the glowing hunter who believes he has just brought down a big bad wolf, the truth must be told. Many of the southern Ontario wolves are dogs,—renegade wild dogs, perhaps, and probably more destructive to sheep and poultry than real wolves, but dogs just the same. Many of these animals have been sent to the Royal Ontario Museum for identification and most of them have proved to be dogs.

Ontario has wolves, of course, and in the south too. The big grey timber wolf, weighing around seventy-five pounds, was at one time found throughout Ontario, but is now seldom encountered south of Haliburton County. The smaller brownish brush wolf or coyote, weighing up to forty-five pounds, is a plains animal and at the turn of the century was confined in Ontario to the western sections of Rainy River and Kenora Districts. Since then it has spread rapidly eastward and is now found in southern Ontario.

Just how abundant the wolf is, is hard to determine, for the issue is clouded by dogs being shot and mistaken for wolves. There is some evidence that brush wolves are interbreeding with stray or renegade dogs. This complicates the problem still further by making identification of some of the animals more difficult.

However, the wolf is still far from being a common animal in southern Ontario. Much of the damage to sheep and poultry blamed on the wolf should in justice be placed where it rightly belongs, on the head of the stray renegade dog.

GREEK AND ROMAN GEMS

We think of gems as blazing stones cut to catch the light. But the Greeks and Romans were more interested in cutting gems for use in rings as imprint seals. They liked to cut figures or heads deep into the stone which would make a relief impression when pressed on sealing-wax. They showed amazing skill in rounding out the cheek and shaping the curly hair so that many heads look like the portraits of their owners. How they did it with merely a tiny bow-drill without aid of eyeglasses or magnifying lenses is difficult to understand. The Royal Ontario Museum has just reset its ancient gems so that you can see for yourself the fine heads, the animals, the little Cupid picking grapes, which must have lent beauty even to mortgages and other legal documents as the business men of antiquity sealed them with these rings.

MUSEUM PLAYS ITS PART IN EDUCATION WEEK

Teachers and educators taking part in Education Week will have an opportunity to visit the Royal Ontario Museum. Special exhibits will be arranged for the occasion but the museum's permanent displays will be most impressive. As inscribed at the entrance to the building, this institution houses “the record of nature through countless ages—the arts of man through all the years.”

LEARNING, A PLEASURE

An early idea of education was that no training can be effectual which is not repulsive and distasteful, that no subject is proper for instruction which is acquired with ease and pleasure! Compare this belief with the modern idea of education, as presented by such an institution as the Royal Ontario Museum. Here topics of science and culture are presented as attractively and pleasantly as possible.

UNWHOLESOME PEST INVADES HOMES

Recently the Royal Ontario Museum has been appealed to by inquirers concerning the identity of a long-legged, hump-backed insect that sometimes infests houses. The insect in question is the Asiatic Camel Cricket. The term “Asiatic” is properly applied because Asia was its original home. It is believed that this insect came from Japan many years ago with a shipment of umbrella plants. The term “camel” has reference to its humped back.

The Camel Cricket is not a seriously destructive pest. It occasionally becomes excessively numerous in houses where it is objectionable for much the same reason as are cockroaches—that is, we just don't approve sharing our homes with a host of big unsanitary insects.

Identifying and naming animals is one of the prominent jobs of a museum. It is important because the name of an animal is the key to all that is known about it. Your museum preserves extensive reference collections of animals, among which the insect collection now numbers well over half a million specimens.

ONCE UPON A TIME—the mountain lion or panther occurred in southern Ontario. A specimen in the Royal Ontario Museum was captured on an island in the St. Lawrence River about 1854.

